

Minutes of Town of Amherst Public Works Committee
meeting of Tuesday, May 3, 2005
1st floor meeting room, Town Hall, 7:00pm

present: Doug Lowing, Guilford Mooring, Michael Cann, Rob Crowner, Vince O'Connor, Walter Wolnik (observer)

1. Doug calls the meeting to order at 7:15pm. Vince asks that members of the committee set up a time to assess in person potential repaving projects not currently scheduled for work this year. Guilford states that he could be available on a Tuesday or Thursday for this purpose.

2. Sidewalks (continued from previous meeting):

Cost estimates for the "new" requests listed at the last meeting (Old Farm Road, Red Gate Lane, Station Road, East Hadley Road) are not yet available. Consideration of these and previous requests (extending back ten years or more) would be for the FY07 sidewalk maintenance plan, which is proposed to have a budget of \$30,000.

Vince suggests rating each proposal for its importance with regard to (a) safety issues and (b) projected foot traffic. Guilford believes a sidewalk on South East Street connecting Colonial Village with the Amherst Crossing intersection would get the most use, with pedestrians traveling to Fort River School and the developing village center on College Street. He explains that there is a sidewalk on Belchertown Road, though it is on the opposite side of the street from the apartment complex [note: confirm?]. Vince states that Colonial Village needs another sidewalk on the South East Street side because the area is so large.

Walter believes that there should be sidewalk access to the Renaissance Center on East Pleasant Street, but Vince points out that the road there is wide (about forty feet) and there is a relatively safe breakdown/bicycle lane where people can walk. By contrast, South East Street is only twenty-four feet wide and has no bicycle lane. However, Vince agrees that there should be a sidewalk between Village Park and Eastman Lane.

Doug requests that the townwide sidewalk evaluation report be made available at the next meeting of the PWC.

Vince suggests that the South East Street sidewalk construction be included in the scheduled repaving of South East Street this year, with its costs covered by Chapter 90 funds. Guilford agrees to try to include it, depending on what bids come in for the project and how much it would cost. In response to a question, Guilford confirms that this section of sidewalk would be covered by the town's winter sidewalk plowing plan.

Rob states that the Red Gate Lane route might not be very highly traveled, but it is somewhat dangerous. Guilford notes that this request came from parents near Main Street who want to form a walking school bus to Wildwood School.

Vince believes there would not be a great volume of foot traffic on Station Road and furthermore the sight lines are pretty good. Walter points out that the Iduna Lane loop covers most of the distance anyway.

With regard to East Hadley Road, Guilford states that there have been several accidents on Mill Valley Road in Hadley, involving people walking to the malls. Vince thinks the appropriate solution to this situation would be a shuttle bus from the apartment complexes to the malls. Guilford suggests that the committee make a statement in the public comment phase of the project. Vince asks whether the Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee has considered this issue.

Doug asks about in-town sidewalks needing repair, specifically mentioning Spring Street. Vince mentions McClellan Street and several spots in North Amherst. Walter points out that part of the problem on McClellan Street is the presence of trees in the sidewalk.

Guilford explains that the FY06 sidewalk budget covers repair work on downtown sidewalks and construction on College Street, but nothing else (though Main Street sidewalks will be repaired when the road is resurfaced). Vince states that a key consideration for deciding on placement of new sidewalks should be whether they would be plowed in the winter; otherwise, if they cannot be used for half the year then they probably aren't worth doing. Guilford states that the proposed Old Farm Road and East Hadley Road sidewalks would be plowed if constructed.

Walter asks whether East Hadley Road could be narrowed to accommodate a new sidewalk, but Guilford explains that buses and trucks need the extra room to make the turn.

Vince asks whether the Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee has compiled a list of recommended bus pulloffs. Such a list should inform the Public Works Committee's consideration of sidewalks. Guilford notes that in South Amherst, at least, whether there is enough public right-of-way might determine if bus pulloffs could be installed in certain places. Vince notes that Town Meeting can be asked to acquire right-of-ways.

3. Updates:

(a) Bridge Street speed limit: Guilford confirms that there is an official speed limit on the section of Bridge Street in question (see previous meeting), but the precise distance needs to be remeasured before the sign can be replaced.

(b) Atkins Corner: Guilford states that the DPW is waiting for Mass Highways to approve the contract before work can begin.

(c) Pomeroy Lane: Guilford states that there has been no word yet on the status of the block grant proposal. Walter states that the Design Review Board will discuss Pomeroy Lane/West Street issues in the Fall.

4. Idling/right turns on red:

(a) North Amherst (Pine/Meadow/North Pleasant): Vince believes that right turns on red should be allowed at this intersection for all directions except eastbound Meadow to southbound North Pleasant, where the sight lines are not good. Guilford explains that the Select Board would make the decision on this matter after receiving input from the committee, the superintendent of public works, and the chief of police (as well as other interested parties, if relevant). Michael wonders whether allowing the right turn on red at some but not corners of an intersection would potentially create confusion for drivers. Vince moves to recommend to the Select Board that right turns on red be allowed for drivers traveling north, south, and west at the Pine/Meadow/North Pleasant intersection, with the prohibition against right turn on red to be maintained for drivers traveling east. The committee votes 4-0 to approve the motion.

(b) East Amherst (North East/Main/South East/Pelham Road): Vince would like to allow right turns on red at this intersection in all directions except during weekdays from 8am to 4pm when the public school is in session, with signs to mark this qualification. Vince also suggests adding right turn stacking lanes on the westbound (Pelham Road) and southbound (North East Street) lanes.

Rob is concerned that the sight line from eastbound Main Street turning southbound South East Street is not sufficient. Rob is also concerned that right turn on red would further discourage pedestrians from crossing an already large intersection. Guilford explains that the "designated pedestrian cycle" (four-way red light to allow diagonal crossing) is one reason that right turns on red are not allowed now. Vince points out that allowing the eastbound right turn would help to discourage traffic using the west side of the East Amherst Common. Michael thinks that signs listing times when right turns are permissible are confusing.

Rob suggests that the committee simply ask the Select Board to study right turn on red at this intersection rather than make a formal recommendation about it. Vince moves to do so, with the specific concerns and recommendations of members of the committee to be communicated to the Select Board. The motion is approved by a 3-0-1 vote.

(c) South Amherst (East Hadley Road/South Pleasant/West Street): Vince proposes allowing right turn on red from East Hadley Road onto West Street. Michael notes that cars don't stop when turning west onto East Hadley Road from South Pleasant Street. Walter finds this intersection "unpleasant" and tries to avoid it. Vince states that the sight line from East Hadley Road toward South Pleasant Street is good and that a pause before turning is encouraged by the uphill nature of the turn and the busy-ness of the intersection. Vince moves to ask the Select Board to study right turn on red at this intersection, with reservations of committee members to be conveyed with the request. The motion is approved by a 3-1 vote.

Vince would like to disentangle the crosswalks at this intersection, but agrees to bring this up at another time. Guilford notes that scheduling crosswalks to be repainted might take all season this year. Vince asks committee members to bring lists of crosswalks needing repainting to the next meeting.

5. Next meeting: The next meeting of the PWC will take place June 7, 2005. The agenda will include (a) sidewalk evaluation report, (b) South Pleasant/East Hadley Road/West Street intersection, traffic controllers (from Vince's memo), and parking/one-way street issues around the Emily Dickinson Museum. The meeting adjourns at 8:55pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Crowner